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AN

EPISTLE

TO THE

Rev. Mr. WARBURTON.

Occasioned

By his TREATMENT of the AUTHOR

OF THE

Pleasures of Imagination.

Neque solum quid istum audire, verum etiam quid me deceat dicere, considerabo.

Cic. in Verr.

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AN

EPISTLE

TO THE

Revd. Mr. WARBURTON.

SIR,

NOtwithſtanding the Pains you have taken to diſcourage all Men from entering into any Controverſy with you; and notwithſtanding the ſevere Example you have juſt been making of one, who as you fancied had preſumed *to call you to Account:* You muſt ſtill be content to be accountable for your Writings, and muſt once more bear the Mortification of being actually called to account for them.

'TIS the Preface to your late Remarks, that you are now called upon to juſtify: in

which you have thought fit to treat upon a mighty *free Footing*, (as you ſtile it, but in the Apprehenſion of moſt People, upon a very injurious one) the ingenious and worthy Author of the Poem intitled, *The Pleaſures of Imagination*. The favourable Reception and Applauſe that Performance has met with, render it unneceſſary, and indeed impertinent, for me to enlarge in its Praiſe. Eſpecially as you, Sir, have not condeſcended to enter into a particular Cenſure of the Poem; however, by ſome general Hints ſcatter'd up and down, as well as by the Affectation of perpetually ſtiling the Author *our Poet*, you may have let us ſee how you ſtand affected towards it. Whether it be indeed that dull, trivial, uſeleſs Thing you ſeem to repreſent it, I ſhall not diſpute with you; but am content to leave, as to this Point, Mr. *W*'s Judgment ſtaked againſt the general Reputation of the Poem. The Point I am immediately concern'd with, is your unbecoming Treatment of the Author, which, as it is ſo interwoven thro' the whole Courſe of your Preface, as to be ſufficiently evident, without the Allegation of particular Paſſages; ſo we ſhall find there are not wanting repeated Inſtances of direct and notorious ill Uſage; ſuch Uſage, as tho' the Provocation had been ever ſo juſt, and the imagined Attack upon you ever ſo real, would yet have been unwarrantable, and which therefore can't admit of the leaſt Shadow of an Excuſe, when it ſhall appear, that you had really no Provocation at all.

For

For the very Fact with which you ſet out, and which is the Foundation, I ſuppoſe, of all your Indignation, is an entire Miſtake. You tell us, you *have been juſt now called to Account*, &c. This, I ſay, is an abſolute Miſtake. And, as for my own Part I never ſuſpected that the Note you refer to had any Thing perſonal in it, ſo I am authoriz'd to affirm, that it was not at all intended perſonally. Indeed whether it was or not, would have been a Matter of little Moment, had but your Preface been written with a becoming Temper. For ſupporting one's own Sentiments, or for examining thoſe of others, a Man needs no Apology; and you might have diſputed the Opinions advanc'd in that Note, whether it reflected upon you or not. But for perſonal ill Treatment, tho' there can be no ſufficient Excuſe, the moſt plauſible one you could alledge, was certainly perſonal Provocation. But however neceſſary you have made this Plea to yourſelf, it will not be allow'd you; nor can you ſhew, that any one Thing in that Note was pointed at you, there being a wide Difference between proving that it may ſuit you, and that it was intended for you.

But this is not the whole of your Complaint. You have been called to Account you ſay, *without any Ceremony*, and that too by the *nameleſs* Author. Having already told you, that the Author had no Thought of calling you to account at all, I am ſaved the Trouble of apo-

logizing either for his want of Ceremony in doing it, or for his not acquainting you with his Name. To ſay the Truth, how either of theſe Points could be in any way to the Purpoſe, I am at a Loſs to conceive; and particularly, how an Author's forbearing to ſet his Name to any Performance, can juſtly expoſe him to be ſo ſeverely handled, or in your own Phraſe, *put him upon that free footing*, on which you treat your Antagoniſts. You ſeem indeed to think it peculiarly your Fortune to be concern'd with *nameleſs* Adverſaries, and I believe you have Reaſon to think ſo; but ſurely you have no Reaſon to complain of a Piece of Fortune, which it is ſo much in your own Power to alter. Write with Decency, treat your Antagoniſts with Civility and Candour, and then depend upon it, you will have the ſame Fortune in this Reſpect with the reſt of the World. But to be publickly miſrepreſented and inſulted, is what every Man will avoid; at leaſt, if he muſt bear a Load of Reproach and Calumny, he will much rather do it under the vague and uncertain Denomination of the Author of this or that Performance, than in his real Name and Character. And in vain will you endeavour to frighten them from this Precaution, by pretending that their concealing their Names is the Reaſon of your uſing them with ſo much Freedom; for let a Man upon any occaſion ſhew himſelf capable of uſing another either unfairly or cruelly, and the World will ever after think the only Security lies in keeping out of that Man's Reach.

But leſt all theſe Reaſons ſhould not appear ſufficient to excuſe you from the Obſervance of the Rules of Civility; and leſt therefore the good-natur'd and unprejudiced Reader ſhould not be enough inclined to reliſh the Severity you was going to uſe; you introduce here one of the moſt approved Arts of Controverſy, and by way of Preparation tell your Reader a very ſhrewd Suſpicion of yours, that the Man you are going to demoliſh is a Deiſt. After this, to be ſure, you might ſafely uſe him as you pleaſed. You don't however venture to aſſert this Point, nor even to ſupport it. You ſay, it ſhould ſeem to be the Caſe.—— Whence ſhould it ſeem ſo? Or are we to take this too upon your Word, as well as the following Aſſertion concerning the Meanneſs of the Author's Talents?

Having thus prepar'd the Way, you proceed to lay open the particular Offence. The Author of the Poem, after having enumerated the principal Sources of Ridicule in the Characters of Men, and laid down a general Definition of the Ridiculous, had gone on to aſſign its End and Uſe. It is in the Note annexed to this Part that you tell us, he has animadverted upon you: And you immediately quote the following Lines. " Since it is beyond all Con-
" tradiction evident, that we have a natural
" Senſe or Feeling of the Ridiculous, and ſince
" ſo good a Reaſon may be aſſigned to juſtify
" the Supreme Being for beſtowing it; one
" cannot without Aſtoniſhment reflect on the

" Conduct

" Conduct of thoſe Men, who imagine it for " the Service of true Religion to vilify and " blacken it without Diſtinction, and endea- " vour to perſuade us that it is never applied " but in a bad Cauſe."

THAT you are pointed at in theſe Lines, you don't ſo muſt as attempt to ſhew. On the contrary, you ſeem (for what Reaſon I know not) to take it for granted; and from that very Suppoſition would prove the Argument to be inconcluſive. For thus you remark, *The Reaſon here given to ſhew that Ridicule and Buffoonry may be properly employed on ſerious and even ſacred Subjects, is admirable.* But as no body ever mention'd or thought of *ſerious and ſacred Subjects* in this Place, your Illuſtration from the Caſes of Adultery and Inceſt will be found very little to the purpoſe. The Reaſoning is here evidently uſed only to ſhew the Impropriety of cenſuring Ridicule without Diſtinction, or to prove that it may be properly and uſefully applied. That it does not prove this, you don't ſo much as pretend: but are content with replying, that this is a Point you never denied. Again, you tell us you never vilified and blacken'd Ridicule without Diſtinction; and therefore, ſay you, the Author ſtretch'd a Point when he told the Reader I had done ſo.— Where has he told him any ſuch Thing? Your Manner of Reaſoning in this Paragraph is indeed quite pleaſant. The Author had paſſed a general Cenſure upon Men of a certain Character, and ſupported that Cenſure by a particular

cular Argument. This you take heinouſly ill, and thus diſprove it. That Character does not belong to *me*: therefore the Author has aſſerted a Falſhood. That Argument does not at all overthrow *my* Sentiments: therefore 'tis impertinent and inconcluſive. But if, as I have already told you, the Reaſoning was not intended to point at you; it ſtill remains, for any Thing that yet appears, intirely unexceptionable.

From his Reaſoning's being conſiſtent with your Sentiments having proved it utterly inconcluſive, you next infer from his farther Agreement with you, that you have now gained a compleat Victory; and, if you don't miſtake his Meaning, he has given you up all you want. Why really, unleſs you had made it appear that there has been ſome Diſpute betwixt you, 'tis hard to underſtand the Meaning of this Triumph. When it is ſaid that Ridicule *is not concerned*, &c. the Meaning, I ſuppoſe, is not only that it ought not to be, but that in reality it can not. Mere ſpeculative Falſhood is no more the Object of Ridicule than it is of moral Diſapprobation. The Inſtances you bring to prove that Ridicule has in Fact been ſo applied, are both extremely unfortunate. The firſt of them you very prudently accommodate to your Purpoſe, by ſaying that the *Subject* of Mr. Locke's Eſſay was ridiculed. For Proof of this you refer to a former Note. But if without ſtopping at your Note, we examine the original Paſſages here pointed at, we

ſhall

ſhall eaſily ſee what it is that is there ridiculed. Let any Man read over that Section from which the Quotation is taken†, and declare whether it is the *Subject* of Mr. *L*'s Eſſay, that Branch of Natural Knowledge, that is itſelf there ridiculed, or whether it is indeed only the undue Regard that was paid to it, it's being advanced to the Neglect of the true and ſovereign Philoſophy, and tho' properly no more than her Handmaid, being ſubſtituted in her Place, or even made to outſhine her in Dreſs and Ornament; deluding us in the mean time with the falſe Aſſurance of an imaginary Improvement, but upon Trial affording no ſubſtantial Uſe in Life. This was the deſtructive Error againſt which that excellent Author here employs the trueſt Humour, as well as the ſtrongeſt Reaſoning: An Error, as he expreſsly obſerves, the more dangerous, as this Sort of Knowledge may ſo eaſily be miſtaken for true Wiſdom. That this, and not the Subject itſelf (to which among the other Sciences he allows its due and ſubordinate Place) is the Point here ridiculed, appears from the whole Section, and more particularly from Page 289 and 299. And thus the Ridicule here uſed will be found to belong to the Poet's third general Claſs. So that with juſt as much Reaſon might you have accuſed him, nay, and our great Satiriſt himſelf too, of ridiculing ſpeculative Truth, in expoſing the miſapplied Pains and Veneration of an extravagant Virtuoſo. As to the other Paſſage quoted in the ſame Note, I ſuppoſe you did not

† *Charact.* Vol. I. Page 279 & ſeq.

not intend to apply it to this Purpoſe; the Point there attacked being evidently the Doctrine, that Virtue and Vice have no other Law or Meaſure than mere Faſhion or Vogue. How little the noble Author deſerves the Charge of Unfairneſs, or of uſing Mr. *L.* ill, in this or his other Cenſures of that Great Man's Miſtakes in Matters of Morality, tho' it would be eaſy to ſhew, yet is not at all to the preſent Purpoſe. 'Tis enough, that from nothing in that Note does it appear that the Subject of the Eſſay, or indeed that any mere ſpeculative Falſhood, has been ridiculed. Your ſecond Inſtance is ſtill more unlucky, and has not ſo much as the Appearance of ſerving your Purpoſe: For (to paſs by the Abſurdity of calling Revelation a mere ſpeculative Point) you tell us, *Revelation is ridiculed in the merry Story of the travelling Gentlemen, who put a Bias on their Reaſon in order to believe right.* This indeed the noble Author did imagine to be the Caſe of ſome zealous *Chriſtians*: But the Thing there ridiculed is not Chriſtianity; 'tis the putting a wrong Bias on one's Reaſon, in order to believe right. And is this a mere ſpeculative Point? Or is it not indeed ridiculous?

And now, after beſtowing another Inſult upon the Author, you proceed to quote his Note as follows: "It is not in abſtract "Propoſitions or Theorems, but in Actions "and Paſſions, Good and Evil, Beauty and "Deformity, that we find Materials for it; "and all theſe Terms are relative, imply-

" ing Approbation or Blame." This Reaſoning you oppoſe by aſking, Are not the former as much relative Terms? Had you repeated the Terms, you could never have put ſuch a Queſtion. Are not *abſtract* Propoſitions relative, implying Aſſent and Denial? Remember ſuch a Miſtake as this, and learn to treat with Tenderneſs the Errors of others.

YOUR next Queſtion is ſo inaccurately ſtated, that the Reaſoning it is oppoſed to would be in no wiſe affected, even tho' it ſhould be anſwered in the Affirmative; for you have intirely dropt the Term *abſtract*. However, as this Difficulty ſtated in its full Strength, would perhaps furniſh the moſt plauſible Objection of any againſt the Author's Theory, and as the Nature of his Work would only allow him to give mere Hints, without entering minutely into the Defence of them; it may be worth while to examine a little more at large, how far, and in what Senſe, abſurd Propoſitions of any Kind afford Materials for Ridicule, and conſequently how far the Account he has given of this Matter is defenſible. Now that Opinions as well as Actions are Objects of Ridicule, will be univerſally admitted. That Propoſitions too are frequently ridiculous, is equally undeniable. But are theſe ever *abſtract* Propoſitions? or can any Propoſition be ridiculous otherwiſe than as refer'd to ſome intelligent Being, who is ſuppoſed to aſſent to it? I apprehend it cannot; and the Caſe I conceive

ceive to be thus: Certain Degrees of Ignorance or Error are one Source of Ridicule. The aſſenting therefore to Propoſitions notoriouſly falſe, muſt certainly afford Materials for it. Now thoſe Propoſitions, the aſſenting to which would imply ſuch Degrees of Ignorance, and conſequently render a Man ridiculous, are naturally enough ſtiled ridiculous Propoſitions: And that it is upon this Account, and in this Reſpect only, that they are ſtiled ſo, may be thus evinced. No Propoſition can ever appear ridiculous to us, till we have firſt ſeen it to be falſe, whether by its Inconſiſtence with itſelf, or with ſome known Truth: Or, the Appearance of Falſhood is eſſential to any Propoſition's ſeeming ridiculous. But were the Ridicule founded on this Falſhood alone, abſtractly conſidered; then all falſe Propoſitions being equally falſe, muſt (when once their Falſhood is diſcovered) appear equally ridiculous. Whereas the Fact is evidently otherwiſe, and the Ridicule riſes in Proportion as the Falſhood is more palpable; or, in other Words, as the Ignorance implied in aſſenting to it is greater. And thus too it will appear how little Ridicule is or can be concerned with mere ſpeculative Truth or Falſhood; concerning which, unleſs firſt determined by ſome other Means, that Faculty could declare nothing at all. Whereas in its proper Province in *Actions and Paſſions, &c.* the Ridicule generally ſtrikes you at firſt View, and always without the Intervention of any other Means.

Let us now ſee how ſtands our Author's Reaſoning. The Point he had in View to eſtabliſh, was the free Uſe of Ridicule. The Debate on this Point had been reduced to this ſingle Queſtion, Whether Ridicule be a Teſt of Truth. In order to clear this Queſtion, he begins with obſerving that we are not to underſtand it of mere ſpeculative Truth; for with that Ridicule is not concerned. For Proof of this he appeals to Fact, where we find that it is not in abſtract Propoſitions or Theorems, but in Actions and Paſſions, Good and Evil, Beauty and Deformity, that we find Materials for it. Theſe therefore, which are notoriouſly the Foundations of Ridicule, being all relative Terms, implying Approbation and Blame, and conſequently incompatible with the very Eſſence of mere ſpeculative Truth or Falſhood; it follows moſt evidently, that with theſe latter Ridicule is not concerned. To aſk then whether Ridicule is a Teſt of Truth, is, in other Words, to aſk whether that which is ridiculous can be true, morally true, can be juſt and becoming; or whether that which is juſt and becoming, can be ridiculous. A Queſtion that does not deſerve a ſerious Anſwer. The Abſurdity of the Queſtion he farther evinces, from the Conſideration of what is the very Nature and Eſſence of Ridicule. For as in a metaphyſical Propoſition offered to the Underſtanding for its Aſſent, the Faculty of Reaſon examines the Terms of the Propoſition, and finding one Idea, which was ſuppoſed equal to another, to be in Fact unequal, of Conſequence

rejects

rejects the Propoſition as a Falſhood: So in Objects offered to the Mind for its Eſteem or Applauſe, the Faculty of Ridicule feeling an Incongruity in the Claim, urges the Mind to reject it with Laughter and Contempt. But whatever we thus reject as unworthy of Applauſe; that is, in other Words, whatever appears ridiculous to us, muſt certainly likewiſe appear morally falſe. From the ſame Account the Author very naturally infers, that when we obſerve ſuch a Claim obtruded upon Mankind, and the inconſiſtent Circumſtances carefully concealed from the Eye of the Public, it is our Buſineſs, if the Matter be of Importance to Society, to drag out thoſe latent Circumſtances, and, by ſetting them full in View, convince the World how ridiculous the Claim is. That this Practice is allowable, one would think could ſcarce be diſputed; and the Advantages gained by it are obvious; for we both detect the moral Falſhood ſooner than in the Way of ſpeculative Inquiry, and impreſs the Minds of Men with a ſtronger Senſe of the Vanity and Error of its Authors. And this, and no more, is meant by the Application of Ridicule, againſt which ſuch grievous Outcries have been made; and which, when clearly explained, appears thus innocent, and even commendable.

I WAS willing to ſtate this Argument at full Length, becauſe the Author's Reaſoning here appears to me remarkably beautiful, well-connected and concluſive. And after this Review of it, I imagine one may more eaſily judge of the Force of your Objections againſt it.

it. First then, you reprove the Author for expoſing a Queſtion which you ſay nobody ever aſked; and yet, in the very next Words, you aſſert, that the ancient Sophiſts ſaid ſomething very like it, and ſoon after yourſelf contend that it is a reaſonable Queſtion. However, that we may not ſuſpect you of any Civility to the Author, you take care to inform us, that it is merely in Civility to Lord S—— (whom, with that Politeneſs natural to you, you perpetually ſtile his Maſter) that you take any Notice of it.

As to the Quotation from the *Characteriſtics*, partly thro' an unlucky Miſtake (your Printer's I ſuppoſe) in putting the Word *Ridicule* inſtead of *Gravity*; and partly thro' its being ſeparated from the reſt of the Sentence with which it ſtands connected; its Pertinence, or even its Senſe, is hardly to be made out without conſulting the Original.

In what follows, you have really done Wonders at perplexing the moſt ſimple Queſtion imaginable. But it is needleſs to trace you all thro' the Labyrinth, ſince the whole Force of all your Objections reſts upon this ſingle Suppoſition, that when the Author aſſerts, that to aſk whether Ridicule be a Teſt of Truth, is the ſame thing as to aſk, whether that which is ridiculous can be morally true; this implies, that whatever Ridicule is applied to, muſt needs be ridiculous. This Conſequence being denied (and indeed, who ſees not that it is entirely

tirely without Foundation?) all the Queſtions you have here heaped together, will be found to be quite beſide the Purpoſe; nor will even your Skill in the *Italian* ſtand you in any Stead. Indeed there can be no other Way of confuting this Aſſertion of the Author's, than by ſhewing that the Queſtion, whether Ridicule is a Teſt of Truth, ought to be, or even can be explained in any other Senſe than what ſhall amount to this; Can that which is ridiculous be true? Not, can that be true to which Ridicule is ever applied? (This is an Abſurdity of your own contriving.) But, can that be true, which by the Application of Ridicule is found to be ridiculous?

At length you are willing to indulge the curious Reader with a little deeper Inſight into this Affair. And here, whatever greater Civility you might be inclined to ſhew to the Maſter, we ſhall preſently ſee you miſtaking and miſrepreſenting his Sentiments, no leſs than thoſe of his Diſciple. You tell us, he was willing to know, whether thoſe Things, which had the Appearance of Serioufneſs and Sanctity, were indeed what they appeared; or (to uſe his own Words in the very Paſſage you quote on this Occaſion) whether they were truly ſerious or ridiculous. But the plain and beaten Path was too long and tedious for ſo ſublime a Genius: He was for going a ſhorter Way to work, and (wonderful Effect of uncommon Sublimity of Genius!) was for making uſe of Ridicule—in order to diſcover what was

was *ridiculous*. To this ingenious Expedient as you term it, for my Part, I can carry my Civility to his Lordſhip no farther, than to call it plain common Senſe: To this Method of Proceeding, however, you thought you had Cauſe to object. But your Objection is ſuch, as would lead one to imagine, that you had never taken the Pains to examine what the noble Author meant by the Application of Ridicule. His Account of it is this: "One of "thoſe principal Lights, or natural Mediums, "by which Things are to be viewed in order "to a thorough Recognition, is Ridicule itſelf, "or that Manner of Proof by which we diſ-"cern whatever is liable to juſt Raillery in any "Subject*.' And now what is the Senſe of your Objection? When you have appplied this Touch, and that to which it is applied, is found to bear it, What Reparation will you make to Truth, for the ridiculous Light in which you have placed her? that is, for having applied to her that Manner of Proof, by which we diſcern whatever is liable to juſt Raillery in any Subject. But can Truth then be injured by the Application of this Proof, or will not, in Reality, her Intereſt be thus moſt effectually promoted by the Confirmation hereby obtained of the Juſtice of her Pretenſions? The Fallacy of the Objection lies entirely in the Ambiguity of the Phraſe, *for having placed her in a ridiculous Light:* By which, if you mean having made her appear ridiculous, I anſwer, this is contrary to the very Suppoſition you

* Char. Vol. I. p. 61.

you laid down, of that to which the Ridicule is applied being found to bear the Touch, and conſequently to be not ridiculous; but if you mean having placed her in ſuch a Light as muſt have diſcovered, whether there was any thing ridiculous belonging to her, this ſurely needs no Reparation, ſince, inſtead of prejudicing, it muſt do her the greateſt Honour. But what your Objection wants of real Strength, you have made Amends for, by the Weakneſs of the Reply you have put into his Lordſhip's Mouth, and which is indeed properly an Anſwer to a quite different Objection.

Against the following Part of the Note you employ nothing but a Sneer or two: The *Philoſophy* of his Criticiſm; *this ſublime Account*; and then tell us, by a moſt elegant Illuſtration indeed, that the Reaſoning in it is nothing to the Purpoſe. The Account itſelf however you have not thought fit to controvert, nor diſputed its being a juſt Repreſentation of the Caſe; and how far it is pertinent and concluſive in the preſent Queſtion, I have already endeavoured to ſhew. But towards the Concluſion of this Part, you have fairly caught your Adverſary; caught him preſuming to deviate from his Maſter's Dictates, for which you accordingly reprove him. Now, tho' this is a Charge from which I ſhould be very little ſolicitous to defend him; you are here again unfortunate in your Inſtance: He applies Ridicule only to the Detection of Falſhood. Lord *S.* ſay you, went farther, and ſays, it is to try Truth; at leaſt you make him ſay ſo; for the

Phraſe is your own, and abſurd enough it is, as uſed here in Oppoſition to the Detection of Falſhood. For does any Man apply Ridicule in order to try what he already knows to be true? Does not this Application neceſſarily imply at leaſt an Apprehenſion that it poſſibly may be found falſe? But if it is only to try what is offered to us for Truth, how can Ridicule do this, but by detecting whatever is ridiculous, and conſequently falſe? The Expreſſion, which you interpret to *try Truth*, is in the Paſſage already cited, *to ſee whether it will bear*; not, as you repreſent it, whether Truth will bear, but whether the Subject ſuppoſed under Examination will bear the Ridicule? whether it has any thing ridiculous in it, any moral Falſhood. The thing recommended in that Place, is the making uſe of the Faculty of Ridicule, in examining whatever may be offered to us. This, you intimate, the Author of the Poem could not defend, and therefore you pretend, that to excuſe his Maſter, he has put another Senſe on the Application of Ridicule; and that by ſaying this and more is meant, *&c.* he has directly excluded the Uſe aſſign'd by the noble Author: This however is a Miſtake; for does not the very Account to which thoſe Words refer, neceſſarily imply and preſuppoſe our having made that Uſe of Ridicule? Does it not ſay when we obſerve any ridiculous Claim obtruded, and how can we obſerve this but by uſing the Faculty of Ridicule in the Examination of that Claim? When you aſk, what need of Ridicule after the Truth is known, if you mean after it is uni-

univerſally known ; I anſwer, none at all. But does it not frequently happen, that the Truth is known to one Man before it is univerſally, or even generally known? And when he has thus obſerv'd any latent moral Falſhood, any thing ridiculous in any Object concealed from the Eye of the Public, may he not very properly and uſefully place the Object in ſuch a Light, as ſhall diſcover that Falſhood to the World, and convince them too how ridiculous it is? Now this is the very Caſe here laid down by the Author.

And thus you ſeem'd to have gone thro' the firſt Paragraph of the Note, when of a ſudden you return to the foregoing Part, and tell us it is ſo expreſſed, as if he intended it not for the Deſcription of the Uſe, but the Eſſence of Ridicule. Why really it is ſo expreſſed, nay he did ſo intend it ; and if he had done otherwiſe, his Reaſoning had been incorrect and inconcluſive. This Objection is indeed ſo very extraordinary, and has ſo little Appearance of Weight in it, that I cannot think you would have gone out of your Way to alledge it, but for the Sake of introducing the Remark that ſtands connected with it. For thus you add, *Whereas the Dealers in this Traſh frequently urge the Mind to reject many Things with Laughter and Contempt, without feeling any other Incongruity, than in their own Pretenſions to Truth and Honeſty, and this our Poet very well knows.* To ſuch an Inſinuation thrown out at Random, and without the leaſt Circumſtance to ſupport it, there

can be no need of a long Anſwer. It would be trifling to go about to remove an Aſperſion, which there is not one Man who knows the Author of the Poem, but will reject with Indignation; nor (I am perſuaded) above one, who has ſo much as read his Performance, that would either ſuggeſt or believe it. And as unneceſſary is it to expoſe the Infamy of throwing out without any Foundation Inſinuations of this kind, or to deſcribe the Temper of Mind from which alone ſuch a Conduct can proceed. Indeed it would be difficult to enter into this Subject without breaking the Reſolution I made from the Beginning, and which I accordingly declared in the very Title-Page to theſe Sheets. I ſhall therefore content myſelf with what is not only more decent, but alſo a much ſeverer Puniſhment than any Retaliation, the calling upon you to explain and juſtify this Inſinuation.

To return to the Argument. The Author of the Note, after having explain'd and defended the free Uſe of Ridicule, proceeds to remove the principal, if not the only Objection ever brought againſt it, *viz.* that the Practice is dangerous. To this he anſwers, "The Practice fairly manag'd can never be "dangerous." And, as there is nothing which Unfairneſs and Diſhoneſty cannot pervert and render miſchievous, 'tis certainly no ſufficient Objection againſt any Practice, that thus managed it would be dangerous. Yes, ſay you, the very ſame Objection is allowed

to

to be ſufficient in the Caſe of Poiſons and Stilletto's. But to make this Reply at all concluſive, you muſt ſhew that the Reaſon of forbidding the promiſcuous Uſe of Poiſons is ſimply this; becauſe the Uſe of them unfairly manag'd would be dangerous. Whereas in this, and all like Caſes, the Queſtion is not whether the Practice may in ſome Inſtances do Miſchief, but whether upon the whole it is likely to be hurtful to Society, whether the free Uſe of it, or the reſtraining it will be attended with the worſt Conſequences. Shew this of Ridicule, prove that reſtraining the Uſe of it will do leſs Miſchief than the promiſcuous Permiſſion of it, and you will then have gain'd your Point. But to ſay the Truth, however you may indirectly hint the Expediency of *forbidding the promiſcuous Uſe and Sale* of this Commodity, and whatever Inclination you may diſcover to be yourſelf one of the licens'd Retailers of it; I much queſtion whether you will care to undertake this Diſquiſition. The Genius and Sentiments of the preſent Age are indeed very little favourable to ſuch Undertakings, inſomuch, that the Enemies of free Inquiry and the Liberty of the Preſs, are aſham'd to own themſelves ſuch; and one rarely meets with a Man who has the Hardineſs to advance any thing prejudicial to them, without firſt aſſuring the Public, that he is their moſt hearty Well wiſher. However, till this Point be made out, that Ridicule does more Harm than Good; upon the whole, the Uſe of it in general will be both defenſible and laudable. And to the Objection that the Practice

ctice is dangerous, it will always be a ſufficient Anſwer, that fairly manag'd it can never be dangerous. For if this Aſſertion be true, (which you don't pretend to diſpute) the Objection will then only hold againſt the unfair Management of it; and for this I know of nobody that contends.

The Author goes on to explain in what manner Ridicule may ſometimes do Miſchief. And this he ſays ariſes not from any Imperfection in our Senſe of Ridicule, (which indeed, if that were the Caſe, could not ſafely be depended upon) but wholly from the miſtaken Conjunction of foreign Circumſtances. "Men may be diſhoneſt in obtruding Cir-"cumſtances foreign to the Object, and we "may be inadvertent in allowing thoſe Circum-"ſtances to impoſe upon us; *but the Senſe of "Ridicule always judges right.*" An Obſervation, which in Spite of all your Banter, is extreamly pertinent, ſince it ſhews, that the Error where we are thus impoſed upon, is not ſo much owing to any Miſtake of our Senſe of Ridicule, as to the Neglect of uſing our Reaſon in firſt ſeparating from the Object thoſe foreign Circumſtances. The Caſe is the ſame even in a Mathematical Demonſtration; where if in reaſoning about a Circle, I join along with its real Properties, others that do not at all belong to it, my Concluſions will certainly be erroneous. Yet nobody would infer from hence, that the manner of Proof is defective or fallacious. And the Queſtion to which this Reaſoning is applied, is neither what you pretend

pretend it ſeems to be, concerning *the Injury to Ridicule itſelf*; nor what you intimate it ought to be, concerning *the Injury to Society by the Abuſe of Ridicule*; but it is truly this, how far and in what Senſe the Faculty of Ridicule ever deceives and miſleads us, and conſequently how far it is to be uſed or truſted to. And here again, you bring in your favourite Inſtance of the Uſe of Poiſons, but to ſtill leſs Purpoſe than before; for while (in order to make the Reaſoning you confute appear more like that here uſed by the Author) you tranſfer ſeveral of his own Words; it happens unluckily, that ſome of thoſe Words are in no Senſe applicable to the Subject you have transferr'd them to; and therefore, inſtead of ſhewing any Weakneſs in the Author's Reaſoning, they are only a Proof that you can apply Words in ſuch a manner, as that they ſhall convey no Meaning at all.

THAT this Account of the Abuſe of Ridicule is a juſt Repreſentation of the Caſe, is farther confirmed by applying it to an Inſtance perhaps the moſt celebrated of any in Hiſtory. "The *Socrates* of *Ariſtophanes* is as truly "ridiculous a Character as ever was drawn. "True: but it is not the Character of *Socra-* "*tes* the divine Moraliſt." Here you aſk, But what ſignifies it to injured Virtue, to tell us that he did not deſerve the Blows he received? Why really I ſhould imagine it always ſignifies a great deal, whether a Man deſerves the Hardſhips he meets with. But in this Place nobody talked of not deſerving, nor was the Queſtion at all what it ſignified to injured Virtue,

Virtue, but merely how that Injury came to be received. And that, the Author contends, was not thro' any Miſtake of the Faculty of Ridicule (for the Character that was laughed at, was truly ridiculous) but thro' the Diſhoneſty of him who endeavoured to perſuade the People that that was the real Character of *Socrates*, and the Inadvertency of thoſe who did not diſtinguiſh the foreign Circumſtances introduced into it. Nay (as he farther obſerves) ſo far was the Uſe of Ridicule from being in this Caſe diſadvantagious to Virtue, that the Philoſopher, by detecting and diſclaiming thoſe foreign Circumſtances, had an Opportunity of rendering the Satiriſt doubly ridiculous in his Turn. But it will ſtill be objected, From whatever Source the Miſtake aroſe, the Ridicule in this Caſe did Miſchief; it had an ill Influence on the Minds of the People. And the Reply is the ſame as that already explained, That any thing's being ſometimes perverted and made miſchievous, is no Proof that its Uſe ought to be laid aſide; ſince at that Rate we muſt reject even the Uſe of Reaſon itſelf. The Force of this Reaſoning, 'tis evident, remains exactly the ſame, whatever may have been the particular Degree of Miſchief occaſioned in the Inſtance referred to. This Circumſtance therefore the Author had left quite at large, and only taken it for granted that Miſchief was really done. But while you, to make the Caſe appear more favourable on your own Side, have been intent upon aggravating the Charge; you have ſuffered your Prejudice to get the better even of your Knowledge of Antiquity.

quity. You talk of it as the Sacrifice of a *Socrates*; and not only tell us that the People did not ſee the Miſrepreſentation of Circumſtances, but you expreſsly aſſert, that *the Fool's Coat they had put upon him, ſtuck to him like a Sambenito, and at laſt brought him to his Execution.* The ſame Account you have likewiſe given in your Preface to the Divine Legation. Now it appears from the beſt Authorities, that the miſleading the People, by giving them a bad Opinion of *Socrates*, was not ſo much as the Intention of the Contrivers of this Ridicule. Their View was to ſound what was at that Time the general Opinion of him, that from thence they might judge whether it would be ſafe to bring a direct Accuſation againſt him. And they judged rightly enough, that there could not be a more effectual Way of making this Trial than by ridiculing him; well knowing, that if the People ſaw his Character in its true Light, they would be diſpleaſed with ſuch a Miſrepreſentation of it, and conſequently not endure the Ridicule. It appeared upon Trial, that they had a juſt Notion of his real Character. Accordingly the Play met with its deſerved Fate, and notwithſtanding the Exquiſitneſs of the Wit, which has been ſo univerſally admir'd, it was abſolutely rejected. The Poet, after making a ſecond fruitleſs Attempt, loſt all Hopes of its ever ſucceeding; and his Abettors were for the preſent ſo diſcouraged from perſuing their Deſigns againſt *Socrates*, that it was not till above twenty Years after the Publication of this Play (as is generally agreed) that they brought their Accuſation againſt him. Indeed, from the whole Hiſtory of that divine

Philoſopher it appears, not to have been (as you repreſent it) the Ridicule employ'd againſt him, that expoſed him to ſuch unworthy Treatment. No, 'twas the Freedom he himſelf took in ridiculing the Ignorance and Vanity of the pretended Teachers of Wiſdom, the Sophiſts of thoſe Days, the Men who were as ready to make Uſe of Ridicule againſt others, as they were to decry its Uſe when turned againſt themſelves; and whoſe conſtant Artifice it was, whenever they were thus attack'd, to perſuade the People that it was Religion that was ridiculed, and the public Authority of the State that was inſulted.

In ſtating the Concluſion of the Note, you beſtow another of your candid Inſinuations upon the Author, by telling us, that to illuſtrate his Anſwer, he has employed the *reſpectable Spinoza*, the Atheiſt, as you had juſt before reminded us. Strange Mark of Reſpect for him indeed! to alledge his Writings as an Inſtance of falſe and miſchievous Reaſoning.

Upon what Account it is that you have diſtinguiſhed the Words *vehement and obſtinate Declaimers*, by putting them in a different Character, I know not: Nor can I tell whether, from any Thing in the Deſcription itſelf, you ſuſpect yourſelf to be here pointed at; or whether, from the Author's applying the ſame Inſtance of *Socrates*, namely, which you had before made uſe of, you may have inferred, that he had all along a particular View to you. 'Tis however evident, that neither of theſe Things can afford any Proof of the Author's having

having had that Intention, nor at all warrant your appropriating theſe Paſſages to yourſelf.

But whatever Queſtion might have ariſen concerning your Title to this Character, or to that before mentioned, you ſeem determined to eſtabliſh, beyond all Diſpute, your Right to all ſuch Cenſures for the future. For 'tis in theſe Words you make your Reply: *What! becauſe* REASON, *the Guide of Life, the Support of Religion, the Inveſtigator of Truth, muſt be ſtill uſed, tho' it be continually ſubject to Abuſe*; *therefore* RIDICULE, the paltry Buffoon of Reaſon, *muſt have the ſame Indulgence!* If this be not to vilify and blacken Ridicule without Diſtinction, 'tis impoſſible to find Words to do it with. *The paltry Buffoon of Reaſon!* Nothing ſurely can be more unwarrantable than ſuch a Way of talking. The very Motto to the Poem under Examination might have ſerved to remind you, how unſuitable a Return it is to our Maker to vilify his Gifts. What indeed may be upon the Whole your real Sentiments of the Uſe of Ridicule, I cannot pretend to determine. The Uſe aſſign'd by the Poet you have more than once burleſqu'd. Whether therefore you ſuppoſe it was given for no Uſe at all, as the Paſſage juſt quoted, as well as ſome others, ſeem to intimate; or whether you ſuppoſe it given for ſome better Uſe, is as yet uncertain: You have not indeed thought fit to tell us what that better Uſe is: But that you muſt have ſome ſuch Uſe to aſſign, one may be led to expect from your own Conduct; ſince, however general your Objections againſt the Uſe of Ridicule are, you don't ſeem to have, upon any

Occaſion, the leaſt Scruple of uſing it yourſelf; and in this very Preface, profeſſedly written againſt the free Uſe of Ridicule, you have hardly done any Thing beſides attempting to ridicule the Author, and the Opinions you was oppoſing.

HAVING thus diſpatch'd the Note, you now proceed to a Paſſage in the Poem itſelf, which has likewiſe given you Offence, and in which you charge the Author with inſulting the whole Body of the Chriſtian Clergy.

" Others, of graver Mien, behold; adorn'd
" With holy Enſigns, how ſublime they move,
" And bending oft their ſanctimonious Eyes,
" Take Homage of the ſimple-minded Throng;
" Ambaſſadors of Heav'n!

As to the Liſt you have given of the Features here drawn, you might have ſpared all but the firſt, it being Pride alone that is here taken into the Account. That the Perſons pointed at well deſerve the Ridicule, you acknowledge, ſuppoſing them to be drawn *like*. And how do you prove that they are not drawn like? Becauſe truly this is not a juſt Character of *the whole Body of the Clergy*. No, nor was it ever intended for them. That it muſt be ſo intended, you argue, becauſe you know of none of them to whom one Part of the Character does not belong. What you may know about it, I ſhall not pretend to diſpute: But for my own Part, I know of many of the Clergy to whom no Part of it belongs, and who

who think they have no ſufficient Warrant for ſtiling themſelves Ambaſſadors of Heaven. Thus much at leaſt is certain and notorious, that among thoſe who do uſe this Stile and Title, 'tis uſed in very different Senſes. If, therefore, there are any, who, by this Appellation mean nothing more, than ſimple Miniſters or Teachers of the Goſpel; and who do not, in conſequence of this Character, take upon themſelves, and affect a Superiority over the reſt of their Brethren: Theſe Men, do, indeed, ſpeak improperly, but are by no Means the Perſons here ridiculed. But if there are any who apply to themſelves this Title in a more exalted and dignified Senſe, who would have it taken in that Senſe by the Vulgar, and who, in Conſequence of this fancied Dignity, behave with an affected Haughtineſs, and expect as much Homage and Submiſſion as could be due to one truly and properly an Ambaſſador from Heaven: Theſe are the Men here expoſed; theſe are the Men who are truly ridiculous; and who, where ever they are not ſcreened by Superſtition or Tyranny, will always be ridiculed.

You did well to tell us, at the Concluſion, that this Ridicule is extremely *dull*; ſince otherwiſe, from the Reſentment you expreſs at it, People would have been apt to imagine that you had found it pretty ſharp. As it is, they can only infer that you feel very ſoon.

Thus I have gone thro' the whole of your Preface: What there is of Argument in it, I have endeavoured to anſwer; and ſome particular

cular Inſtances of your ill Treatment of the Author of the Poem I have expoſed: 'Tis of this you are called upon to give ſome Account. If, indeed, a Man's mentioning Lord *S*——— with Honour muſt make it *ſeem* that he is a Deiſt, and his quoting *the Atheiſt Spinoza* with Diſapprobation, that he is a Favourer of Atheiſm; if his differing in Opinion from Mr. *W*—— proves him to be not wiſe, and his ridiculing what Mr. *W*—— holds ſacred, to be not honeſt; you have then a ſufficient Warrant for the Inſinuations you have advanced: But if theſe Foundations fail, you muſt aſſign better; and you have yet to reconcile ſuch Treatment with Good-Manners, Candor and Truth. How far you may care to undertake this, or what Part you may chooſe to act on this Occaſion, is a Point that chiefly concerns yourſelf. That you cannot juſtify your Inſinuations, and your Ill-uſage of the Author, I am ſufficiently ſecure. Should you, therefore, think fit to retract them, I ſhall rejoice to ſee Juſtice done to a Man of Merit, and to find that you are not leſs ready to wipe off Aſperſions, than you was to beſtow them. But if, without attempting to juſtify them, you ſhould, by refuſing to retract them, in effect continue to aſſert them; I ſhall, at leaſt, have the Satisfaction of having ſaved every honeſt Man, who may hereafter offend you, the Trouble of anſwering, or at all regarding your Cenſures and Reproaches.

I am, &c.

FINIS.